Encouraging Sikhs To Share Their Faith

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1 Contents Page

1 Contents Page 1
2 Why has this document been written? 2
3 Changes to your Gurdwara 2
3.1 The Purpose of a Gurdwara 2
3.2 Having an open, warm and friendly welcome 2
3.3 Open Days for your Gurdwara 4
3.4 Location of new Gurdwaras 4
3.5 Providing Additional Support Services 4
3.6 Providing Translation Services 4
4 Reaching Out 5
4.1 Giving Free Ice-Cream in the City Centre 5
4.2 Invite the city to a Diwali Fire Works Display 5
4.3 Newspaper Mail shots on Vaisakhi Day 5
4.4 Family Camping Trips 6
4.5 Sikhism Books in your Library and New Age Bookshops 6
4.6 Sikh literature and CD's with translated Guru Granth Sahib 6
4.7 Gurmukhi/Punjabi Classes for Adults and New Sikhs 6
4.8 Articles in Local Newspapers and Local Radio 6
4.9 Personal Attitude 6
5 The Power of Youth 7
5.1 Inter Cultural, Racial and Caste Marriages 7
5.2 Sikhism Awareness Days/Week in your Local University 7
5.3 Fancy Dress Day 7
5.4 Using Music as a tool for Spreading the Gurus message 7
5.5 Put pamphlets on School/College/University Boards 7
5.6 Join Multi-Faith Networks 7
5.7 Inclusion of Youth in Gurdwara Services 8
6 Inspiration for this Document 8

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2 Why has this document been written?

It is shocking to find that the mainstream Sikh community has become extremely lazy when it comes to sharing their faith with non-Sikhs. There are no/very few Sikh missionaries and there are zero missionary centres which actually offer free educational programmes on Sikh spirituality and Sikh philosophy to non-Sikhs. The common argument given for this situation is that Sikhs don't convert people. However, this is in complete contradiction to the lives of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak Dev Ji is Earth's most widely traveled Prophet. He undertook four major journeys in order to spread the truth to as many people as possible. The subsequent Gurus also built on this tradition of educating the masses about the Truth. This is the reason why Sikhism is still alive today and why we are 20 million people.

But sadly after the Gurus, our community has done little (with the exception of a few groups/individuals) to propagate Sikh philosophy and the Sikh lifestyle.

It is not an accident that followers of the Sikh faith are present in every country now. This is part of the Lord's divine plan to spread the message of Truth. Sikhs in countries outside India are ambassadors of the Guru. It is not acceptable to just sit around, hide out, worship amongst Indian-Punjab Sikhs only or stick exclusively to your own culture and caste. Sikhs must mix with the indigenous communities of the countries which they inhabit and share their faith.

This document contains ideas for good ways for Sikhs to share their faith with other people and every Sikh should make it their duty to spread the message of Sikhism. This will not only consolidate the faith of the Sikhs but also win many converts because the lifestyle and the philosophy is fantastic! The document has been divided into 3 main sections including:

- Changes to your Gurdwara
- Reaching out
- The Power of Youth

3 Changes to your Gurdwara

3.1 The Purpose of a Gurdwara

The Gurdwaras started by the Great Sikh Masters were the World's first multi faith centres. The Gurus embraced people of all cultures, races and religions and welcomed them all to the house of the Guru. It is important to remember this tradition when running a Gurdwara.

3.2 Having an open, warm and friendly welcome

This is crucial for non-Sikhs interested in Sikhism and for visitors to feel comfortable and relaxed. The things you can do to ensure that our Gurdwaras are open, warm and friendly places is to have:

- A sevadar at the entrance to the Gurdwara to welcome people and to show people around if necessary
- A large modern stylish bill board kept outside the Gurdwara with a selection of Sikh beliefs in the local language of the people. This means that if your Gurdwara is in France then you would use French as the language and not Punjabi. If the Gurdwara is

in Germany then you would use German. The purpose of the board to would to provide a quick insight into a few Sikh beliefs as people pass the Gurdwara on their way to work or the town centre. The contents of the board could include the following items:

This is a Sikh place of Worship

Everyone is Welcome

Sikhs believe in:

1 One God known by many names (Jehovah, Ram, Allah, Waheguru)
2 Brotherhood of all human beings (including all races, cultures and religious groups)
3 Exercising Compassion, Charity and Discipline
4 Democracy
5 Freedom of speech and Freedom of religion
6 Gender Equality
7 Earning an honest living and living a family life
8 Good thoughts, good words and good deeds
9 Meditation and regular exercise for a healthy mind, body and soul
10 Importance of Science, Technology and Education for human development

- Upon entering the Gurdwara there should be another bill board designed for visitors who may have never entered a Gurdwara and who may be unsure of what to do. The contents of this board should be aimed at providing the few rules which should be followed when in a Gurdwara and a map of the Gurdwara with everything labeled. Again you should ensure that the board is in the local language of the people. It's no good having the following message board in Punjabi!

This is a Sikh place of Worship

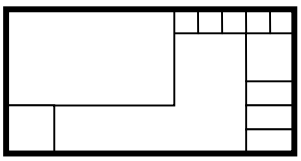
Everyone is Welcome

Could all people entering the Gurdwara kindly:

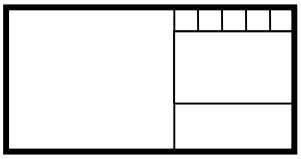
- Not use Alcohol, Tobacco or Drugs
- Dress modestly
- Not bring pets inside the Gurdwara
- Cover your head with a head scarf (on wall in front of you)
- Take off your shoes and socks in shoe room (see site map)
- Wash your hand

Services

- Enjoy a free meal in the Langar Hall!
- Meditate in the Prayer Hall
- Other Services listed here...



Ground Floor Map



First Floor Map

3.3 Open Days for your Gurdwara

Open days for the Gurdwara (especially on a Gurpurab/Diwali or other religious occasion) should be held regularly and everything should be done to make the wider public aware of the event. An example would be to include an advert in the local paper and/or have it announced on the local radio station (this is usually done at no cost because it is a 'news' item). On an open day you should ensure there are stewards (preferably children) who welcome people into the Gurdwara and who will show people around and talk about the different elements constituting a Gurdwara. It would also be great to have some vegetarian dishes native to the land as well as talks, poems and songs in the local language of the people e.g. German, French etc. so that visitors can truly get a glimpse of Sikh spirituality.

3.4 Location of new Gurdwaras

If you are building a new Gurdwara then please consider building it in an area which contains as many non-Sikhs as possible or at least as far from other Gurdwaras as possible. The reason for this is to allow non-Sikhs to be given a chance to experience Sikh spirituality and find out about the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.

The Gurus traveled to many different parts of the world to establish congregations. It is our duty as ambassadors of the Guru to do the same. It is time now for Sikhs to proactively increase the racial and cultural diversity within the Sikh community.

Again it would be important to ensure that services (e.g. Sunday services) contain a mixture of Punjabi (for the older Punjabi generation) and poems, songs and translations in the local language of the country. This will be for the benefit of the Sikh youth and new people joining the faith. To make this a success you will need to mobilize and utilize the skills of the younger generation and new Sikhs as much as possible.

3.5 Providing Additional Support Services

There is currently no post-Amrit facility or service for members of the Sikh faith to attend if they are experiencing problems or difficulties of any kind after having taken Amrit. There should be a support team established either locally or at a regional level in the country where people can go with questions regarding the Sikh faith. If there are educated people in the community with knowledge of the faith then they should make themselves known to the community and offer their time to people who have questions about their spirituality. Every Sikh should make an effort to learn about the faith and share their insights with other Sikhs and non-Sikhs.

3.6 Providing Translation Services

It is no longer acceptable to just have a Sunday service in Punjabi only especially for congregations based outside of India. You MUST have poems, Keertan and Katha (explanation of the scriptures) in both Punjabi and the local language of the country. A good start would to have at least 50% of a programme in Punjabi and 50% of the programme in the local language.

Secondly the following website provides a Keertan translation search engine which has shabads in both Punjabi and English www.sikhitothemax.com Your Gurdwara should invest

in an electronic projector screen and a laptop which it can use to project the translations of meanings of the hymns sung in the Gurdwara.

The Hukamnama and the Ardas should be done in both the local language and Punjabi. A good model to start with is to say the requests of the Ardas in both the local language of the country and Punjabi. Or you can choose to do a local language version of the Ardas after the Punjabi Version or whatever.

4 Reaching Out

Reaching out - means, leaving the safe environment of our Gurdwara and pro-actively disseminating information about Sikhism and making non-Sikhs aware of the Sikh community. Some ideas for things which you can do are given below:

4.1 Giving Free Ice-Cream in the City Centre

On the day we commemorate the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji, it is traditional for Sikhs to give out ice-cream to remind people of the sacrifice performed by the 'King of Martyrs and the Ocean of Peace'.

It would be great to prepare an information leaflet about Guru Arjun Dev Ji (just a one side A6 document) describing his sacrifice and what it means to the Sikh community. The stall would ideally be set up in the middle of the city centre with a big sign saying 'FREE ICE-CREAM' and you would give free ice-cream to anyone requesting it - and yes there will be lots of people queuing up!

Most people will naturally ask why you are giving out free ice-cream and you will be able to give them the small leaflet and talk about the sacrifice of Guru Arjan Dev Ji or Sikhi in general. This is a fun way of spreading the message of Sikhi.

You could give out other free items on a religious day such as free sweets on Guru Har Krishans Birthday in the city centre and give out colouring pictures to young children.

4.2 Invite the city to a Diwali Fire Works Display

Diwali is always a fun festival and you could invite the general public to join you at the Gurdwara for celebrating Diwali. Plenty of free sweets, a children's play area, a Bouncy Castle, speeches in the local language and a fireworks display to end the evening would be a great example of sharing the faith by having fun.

4.3 Newspaper Mail shots on Vaisakhi Day

In the United Kingdom it is possible to put a flyer in one of the local newspapers. The flyer would then reach everyone in the local community/city. This is relatively inexpensive and would ensure a very large coverage. You would want to include a brief description of Vaisakhi and the basics of the Sikh faith. The leaflet would ideally be no more than 1 A4 page (both sides) and it would be posted out 1 week earlier than the Vaisakhi celebrations so that anyone wanting to visit the celebrations could do so.

4.4 Family Camping Trips

Sikhi Camps are great ways for people to spend time together, learn about the faith and have fun!. Everyone on a camp should be treated equally and preference should be given to people who have recently entered the faith or people who are interested in becoming Sikhs and want to experience Sikh spirituality.

4.5 Sikhism Books in your Library and New Age Bookshops

Make sure your local library is stocked with plentiful books on the Sikh faith. If it is not then you should raise the issue with your library and make sure they stock up on books. They will do this if you request it. Also ensure that your local bookshop (whether NewAge or not) has books on Sikhism available.

4.6 Sikh literature and CD's with translated Guru Granth Sahib

All Gurdwaras should have a stall in their reception with lots of free literature on display for people to take. CD's / Disks should also be made available with the entire Guru Granth Sahib and Keertan to take away for free in the reception hall. This could be done by copying the fantastic translations available on www.sikhnet.com on to CD.

4.7 Gurmukhi/Punjabi Classes for Adults and New Sikhs

Punjabi/Gurmukhi classes should be made available for adults who are not Punjabi speaking. This would also benefit young Punjabi adults who missed out on the opportunity of learning to read/write/speak Punjabi.

4.8 Articles in Local Newspapers and Local Radio

It is always a great idea to send in an article on the Sikh faith before a religious day to a newspaper and/or the local radio. These are also great tools to use to publicise any events/open days which you may be holding at the Gurdwara and they will usually do it free of charge.

4.9 Personal Attitude

As an ordinary Sikh it is your duty to ensure that your Gurdwara is as open and friendly as possible to non-Sikhs. Always show kindness and consideration to all people visiting the Gurdwara and make it your personal responsibility to resolve any problems they had during their visit. Make sure you ask them if they enjoyed their visit. It is these single acts of kindness and consideration which will help to propagate the Sikh faith.

5 The Power of Youth

5.1 Inter Cultural, Racial and Caste Marriages

Young Sikh people should be encouraged to marry people from other cultures, races and castes. This is in line with the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh said, 'Recognise the human race as one unit'. So if we truly believe this then we should encourage mixed marriages. The couple should be married as per Sikh rites and both sides of the families must be made to feel comfortable in the Gurdwara.

5.2 Sikhism Awareness Days/Week in your Local University

As young Sikhs you need to take the time to organise a Sikhism awareness week / day which will include lectures on various aspects of Sikh philosophy and the Sikh Lifestyle. These should be advertised openly in the university magazine (preferably the front page) and should be in an accessible lecture theatre. You could also have a meditation session at the end of the lecture or devote one evening in the 'Sikhi awareness week' to give young people an experience of Sikh meditation.

5.3 Fancy Dress Day

On a religious day you could get a group of Sikhs and non-Sikhs to disseminate free sweets (e.g. lollipops) to all the people walking through the students union. Also you could give all interested people a small information leaflet on Sikhism. This would be a fun way of spreading the wonderful message of Sikhi. I would recommend dressing up as either action heros (e.g. he-man, she-ra, Superman, Incredible hulk, Spiderman etc.) or animals (e.g. cow, dog, giraffe, lion, cat, bird etc.)!

5.4 Using Music as a tool for Spreading the Gurus message

Young Sikh people should use their knowledge of rapping, street music, rock n'roll, RnB, Soul, Hip Hop, Classic music and digital technology to translate the message of the Gurus into something which the average person in the local country could relate to. You could play this music in the city centre or at a university campus or just for the wider Sikh youth population. This would be a great way of expressing your love for Sikhism and introducing more people to the Sikh faith.

5.5 Put pamphlets on School/College/University Boards

Make sure your university campuses have plenty of information on Sikhism for any interested students. Your University may have a multi-faith network and if it does then make sure you have a seat on it!

5.6 Join Multi-Faith Networks

Again, you need to join as many of the inter-faith networks as possible both inside and outside the university campus so that more people become aware of the teachings of the Sikh faih.

5.7 Inclusion of Youth in Gurdwara Services

Young Sikhs must be given every chance to manage Gurdwara Programmes and provide translations of Keertan, poems and Sikh Philosophy in the local language of the country. This will help to provide a strong Sikh leadership for the future with a good grasp of Sikhism and it will make the experience of attending a Gurdwara better for new Sikhs and visitors due to the translations.

5.8 Setting up local and national Sikh Youth Associations

Every University should have a 'Sikh Spiritual Society' and the Sikh youth in every city should take the initiative to create a 'Sikh Youth Association'. Both of these group should be linked with one another and linked to a 'National Assembly of Sikh Youth/Students'. An example of this is BOSS British Organisation of Sikh Students. BOSS provides support and educational material to all the university Sikh Societies in the United Kingdom if they require assistance. The aim of all Sikh societies should be to raise the awareness of the Sikh faith through educational programmes and fun activities.

6 Inspiration for this Document

The inspiration for this document came from a Mrs Yogi Kaur who posted an extremely educational post on www.Sikhnet.com describing her journey through life and the difficulties she encountered when becoming a Sikh. I would hope that the Sikh community implements as much of the suggestions as possible (ideally all of them) to ensure the continual growth of the faith and to ensure that people find the Sikh journey inspirational from the beginning until the day they pass to the next world.